JOHN BRADSHAW
"INDIAN SPY"
DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

By
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1992

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In May 1929, the Federal Government erected a monument in the cemetery of the small West Virginia town of Huntersville. The monument was to the memory of a local hero, John Bradshaw. It's gone now.

Even in 1929 no resident of Huntersville was then so long-lived as to have had personal recollections of John Bradshaw, for Bradshaw had died in November or December of 1837. There were, at the time, sufficient sites around the town to keep his memory alive and the townspeople could point out where the wild cherry tree had grown directly over his grave. That, too, is gone now.

John Bradshaw had come to the site where Huntersville now stands in the early 1800's and there he erected his solitary cabin home. Soon afterwards the people of Bath county constructed a wagon road from Warm Springs, over the mountains, to Bradshaw's cabin. An enterprising man named John Harness began hauling goods from Staunton, Virginia, into the mountains of West Virginia for the purpose of trading with the trappers and settlers, and it was at Bradshaw's house that he made his headquarters. Out of his stock in trade, which was largely salt, coffee, gunpowder, lead, and calico, he traded with the hunters who brought their pelts, venison, and ginseng. From this trading post the place became known as Huntersville.

In the month of March, 1821, the General Assembly of Virginia passed a measure to form a new county out of portions of Bath, Pendelton, and Randolph counties. The first county court for this new county called Pocohontas was convened at Bradshaw's cabin on March 5, 1822. Sixty-six year old Bradshaw watched as the court chose officers for the county and then accepted his own appointment as one of the Justices of the Peace. In the month of May following the first Grand Jury that ever sat for the county was empaneled at Bradshaw's cabin. Among the twenty-two sworn jurors were men from all over the area; McNeel, Moore, Grimes, Lewis, Bridger, Lockridge, Dougherty, and Bradshaw's son-in-law, Samuel Hogset. These men had journeyed from their isolated settlements scattered throughout the hills and valleys. In all there were probably no more than 200 residents of the county. These were mountain men with mountain ways.

The cosmopolitan lawyer of Augusta county, John Howe Peyton, ventured up to Huntersville in 1823. Upon arrival back to the relative comfort of Warm Springs, Peyton wrote his wife about his fatigueing journey:

John H. Peyton to Mrs Peyton

Warm Springs, Sept 1st, 1823

My Beloved Ann;

On the day we parted the Judge (Archibald Stuart) and myself arrived without adventure at General Blackburn's.

On the next day at Colonel Cameron's and on Tuesday at two o'clock arrived at Huntersville, the seat of the Justice of Pocohuntas (sic) county - a place as much out of the world as Crim Tartary. Owing to the bad conditions of the roads we were much fatigued and bore many marks of travel-stain. The so-called town of Huntersville consists of two illy-constructed time-worn (though it is not time that has worn them) weather-beaten cabins built of logs and covered with clapboards. My negro cabins on Jackson's river are palaces in comparison with them.

One of these wretched hovels is the residence of John Bradshaw, the other is the Loom-house for these people are self-sustaining. They spin and weave. The big wheel and little wheel are birring in every hut and throw off the woolen and linen yarn to be worked up for family purposes. The home-spun cloth, too, is stronger and more durable than that brought by our merchants from Northern manufacturers.

In Bradshaw's dwelling there is a large fireplace, which occupies one entire side, the gable end. The chimney is enormous and so short that the room is filled with light which enters this way. It is an ingenious contrivance for letting all the warmth escape through the chimney, whilst most of the smoke is driven back into the chamber. In the chimney-corner I prepared my legal papers before a roaring fire, surrounded by rough mountaineers, who were drinking whiskey and as night adavanced, growing riotous. In the back part of the room two beds were curtained off with horse-blankets - one for the Judge, the other for myself. To the left of the fireplace stood old Bradshaw's couch. In the loft, to which they ascended, by means of a ladder, his daughter and the hired woman slept, and at times of a crowd, a wayfarer. The other guests were sent to sleep in the Loom-house, in which was suspended in the loom, a half-woven piece of cloth. Three beds were disposed about the room, which completed the appointments - one was allotted to Sampson Matthews, a second to John Baxter, the third to George Mays, and John Brown. The loom was used as a hat-rack at night and for sitting on, in the absence of chairs, in the day. As there was not a chair or stool beyond those used

by the weaving women, my clients roosted on the loom while detailing their troubles and receiving advice.

Bradshaw's table is well supplied. There is a profusion, if not prodigality in the rich, lavish bounty of a goodly tavern. We had no venison, as this is a shy season with the deer, but excellent mutton with plenty of apple sauce, peach pie, and roasting ears. As a mark of deference and respect to the Court, I presume, we had a table cloth - they are not often seen on Western tables and when they are, are not innocent of color - and clean sheets on our beds. This matter of sheets is no small affair in out of the way places, as not unfrequently happens that wanderers communicate disease through the bedclothing. Old Bradshaw's family is scrupulously clean, which is somewhat remarkable in a region where cleanliness is for the most part on the outside. A false modesty seems to prevent those salutary ablutions which are so necessary to health, and I did not commend myself to the good graces of the hired woman by insisting on my foot-bath every morning.

We remained five days at Huntersville closely engaged in the business of the Court, which I found profitable. Pocohontas is a fine grazing county, and the support of the people is mainly derived from their flocks of cattle, horses and sheep, which they drive over the mountains to market. There is little money among them except after these excursions, but they have little nedd of it - every want is supplied by the happy country they possess, and of which they are as fond as the Swiss of their mountains. It is a pretty country, a country of diversified and beautiful scenery in which there is a wealth of verdure and variety which keeps the attention alive and the outward eye delighted.

On Saturday the Judge and I visited Sandy Lockridge, where we were very hospitably entertained. His house is in every way a respectable dwelling, with plenty of room and very good furniture. On Saturday we returned to Col. Cameron's and this evening arrived here in sound health and excellent spirits, notwithstanding our rough experiences. I was much disappointed not to find a letter awaiting me from my dear wife. Ben Crawford has, however, relieved my anxiety, by telling me that he saw you on Saturday sitting at the front window of your dining-room writing, and thought he heard the prattle of Susan in the room. I imagine you were writing to me and hope to-morrow's mail will fetch the coveted letter.

Your father's will has been recorded in Alleghany county and your brother William has qualified as sole executor - the sale is to take place day after tomorrow, but nothing will be sold but the livestock. I have seen none of our relations or connections since I have left home - have learned these facts from others.

Accept the best wishes of your husband for yourself and our dear little girl, and believe me,

Yours affectionately,

John H. Peyton.

If John Howe Peyton had little respect for his backwoods clients, it is more than likely his clients took full-measure of their lawyer. These circuit- riding lawyers were often regarded as meddlers, quarrel-mongers, and worse by their clients, but the profession was the quickest and surest way to social prominence and political office on the frontier. Here a powerful constitution, common sense, and a journalist's nose for gathering and delivering the latest news were more important than a knowledge of the fine points of the law. It may have been Peyton who brought the news of Congress' appropriation for pensions to be paid to Revolutionary War Veterans.

John Bradshaw offered application for his Revolutionary War Pension on the 2nd of February 1833. He was, then, seventy-four years old and recalling his experiences of some 50 years earlier. His statements are concise and direct narrations of his service dates, commanders, and assigned duties. Still, reading his deposition one gets the feeling his memory was sharp and clear but that he felt no need to brag, or even tell all his war experiences in detail. In fact, a short study of the contemporary times on the western frontier of Virginia tells more about Bradshaw's experiences than his application; together they tell an interesting tale of adventure.

In 1776 Bradshaw was an eighteen year old private in Captain John Henderson's company of Militia at the lower end of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Henderson was settled on Draper's Medadows road between the North Fork of the Roanoke and Tom's Creek. Nearby lived Andrew Lewis, the hero of Point Pleasant, fought in October of 1774. Further west, up through the narrow defiles of the New River, Captain Wallace Estill had established his settlement on the Indian Creek in what is now Munroe county, West Virginia. Estill and his formitable fighting force of eight sons formed the western barrier to English-inspired Indian attacks during the American Revolution. One of Estill's daughters married into the Henderson family.

No less a fighting force was "General" Andrew Lewis and his three brothers; Thomas, Sammuel, and William. Charles, another brother, had been killed at Point Pleasant. John Howe Peyton's second wife Ann, to whom he addressed the letter previously quoted, was the grandaughter of William Lewis "the Civilizer of the Border".

Young John Bradshaw was ushered into this world of experienced frontiersmen on the first of May, 1776, when he took the Oath of Fidelity and the Oath of Performance to undertake the duties of an "Indian Spy". Four successive spring and summer seasons, 1776 through 1779, Bradshaw and one companion patrolled the woodlands between New River, Laurel Creek, and Stony Creek. Leaving Cook's Fort on Indian Creek they would be out four days each week and then return when their replacements would then go out. They took stands at the gaps and low places on the mountains between William Lafferty's plantation on the New River and the headwaters of Laurel Creek where they met spies from Burnside's Fort. They traversed the entire county; the headwaters of Big and Little Stony Creek, the Indian Draft (a branch of Indian Creek), and the headwaters of Wolf Creek. Each man carried his own provisions, traveled light and fleet-footed, and slept cold being forbidden by his Oath to light a fire.

Unless he was somehow different from his contemporaries Bradshaw would have been clothed in a hunting shirt, a loose wraparound frock of coarse linen that hung below his thighs, lashed to his body by a belt which was always tied at the back. Suspended from his belt were his scalping knife, powder horn, bullet pouch, and tomahawk. Most men chose to protect their legs with a pair of breeches and laced leather leggings but Bradshaw might have copied other young scouts who wore only a breechcloth and high leather stockings under their hunting shirt which left their upper thighs and most of their buttocks bare. The hunting shirt was a knapsack as well as a garment and into it the scout could stuff a large chunk of cornbread, salt, cold meat, and a bundle of gun-cleaning tow. Moccasins were the footwear of the day and were customarily stuffed with deer hair or dried leaves for ipsulation. The last, and most indispensable, piece of his outfit was his long-barrelled, flintlock, Pennsylvania rifle (only later called a Kentucky rifle).

Bradshaw's scouting companions were Francis Ellis, who was considerably

older than Bradshaw, and Sammuel Estill who was just three years older. Estill stayed for just one season with Bradshaw in western Virginia and the following year he helped Daniel Boone defend Boonesboro in Kentucky.

The establishment of Kentucky forts relieved the threats of Indian attacks into the Shenandoah Valley, and the capture of the British western commander, in 1779, assured the American westward expansion.

John Bradshaw moved northward in the Shenandoah and settled in Parnassus, near Staunton where he met and married Nancy McKamie.

Virginia alone of the southern colonies had escaped the heavy ravages of war until 1780 when the traitorous Benedict Arnold, now a British brigadier general, headed a large detachment that disembarked at Westover on the James River. Washington had long warned Jefferson that Virginia must defend itself but Jefferson was unable to mount proper forces. Arnold entered Richmond unopposed then went further upstream and destroyed a gunpowder factory and iron foundry at Westham. Virginia militiamen under Von Steuben turned Arnold back to Portsmouth where he decided to take up winter quarters. Jefferson was determined to capture the "greatest of all traitors".

Bradshaw was drafted from Augusta county in January 1781. His company commander was Capt. Thomas Hicklin, his lieutenant was Joseph Gwinn, and his Ensign was Thomas Wright. Hicklin's company was attached to the regiment of Col. Sampson Matthews - father of Sampson Matthews who lodged in Bradshaw's loom-house during John Howe Peyton's visit ?

Matthew's force marched across the Blue Ridge Mountains, through the Rockfish gap, and down the James River to Richmond. From Richmond they moved down the James to Sandy Point where they crossed the river and, finally, they encamped in the Dismal Swamp outside Portsmouth where they wintered for the remainder of the season. Bradshaw spent time scouting the picket lines guarding Portsmouth and was engaged in one skirmish during which a Captain Cunningham from Rockbridge was wounded in the groin. Bradshaw said Cunningham fell just a few paces in front. Bradshaw was a Sargeant.

Benedict Arnold escaped the noose and most of the Virginia militiamen were sent home for the summer harvest. Bradshaw was discharged 9 April, 1781.

The danger to Virginia was not passed. Lord Cornwallis was obsessed with the importance of Virginia to the overall British strategy. Cornwallis had reached Virginia shortly after the middle of May and began a wild-goose chase after LaFayette. Arnold attempted to turn Lafayette's left flank and get behind him but Lafayette recognized that his forces were too small to resist and he withdrew to the north. Sir Henry Clinton, writing from New York, insisted that Cornwallis take and hold a post on the Chesapeake and send 3,000 of his troops to defend New York. Cornwallis picked Yorktown.

Virginia's defenses were split in half, LaFayette holding ground in the interior, and the forces of General Greene struggling up through the Shenandoah from North Carolina. The British light cavalry, under Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, made a lightning attack centered on Charlottesville in an attempt to capture Thomas Jefferson and other members of the Assembly who were sheltering there. Most of the Assemblymen escaped over the Blue Ridge mountains to Staunton. Jefferson escaped from Monticello and went elsewhere.

Bradshaw was once again drafted, "in the latter part of summer or early autumn". The company commander was still Capt. Hicklin, but the Regiment was now commanded by Col. Samuel Vance.

The call to arms was issued late Saturday night. Bradshaw's young wife cooked, washed, cried, and prayed all day Sunday and had him ready for war early Monday morning, and by nightfall he was in Staunton on his march. Down, again, through the Rockfish Gap the Regiment skirted north-east to Bowling Green, passing the Page Wase House to "Little York" where the seige of Yorktown was about to commence. Bradshaw would say, later, that here he fought in blood "shoe-mouth deep".

General Washington arrived at Yorktown on September 15. The American heavy cannon, ordnance stores, and ammunition was just beginning to arrive and it would be a month before they were ready to fire back at the British guns that were already raking the American trenches. In the meantime some of the militiamen amused themselves by taunting the British;

"A militiaman this day, possessed of more bravery and (sic) prudence, stood constantly on the parapet and d----d his soul if he would dodge for the buggers. He escaped longer than could have been expected, and, growing foolhardy, brandished his spade at every ball that was fired, till, unfortunately, a ball came and put an end to his capers ..." -Diary of James Duncan. entry for October, 3, 1781.

October 9th ninety-two American cannon, mortars, and howitzers opened their first bombardment. It was said the first shell entered an elegant house formerly occupied by the Secretary of State under the British government, struck and killed a number of British officers as they sat at dinner. Eight days later Cornwallis realized that all hope of retreat was lost and he opened negotiations for surrender. In two days all points of surrender were agreed and at about noon the combined force of American and French were drawn up in two lines stretching more than a mile in length from Yorktown to the field where the British soldiers were to stack their arms. At two o'clock the British marched out, headed by General O'Hara who substituted for Cornwallis. Cornwallis plead that he was indisposed.

After returning to Yorktown, the British were guarded by Bradshaw's company and others and then marched north across Virginia to Winchester at the head of the Shenandoah Valley. The war was over for Bradshaw and he was discharged the day after reaching Winchester.

Bradshaw and his wife moved to a new place, ten or eleven miles below McDowell, on the Bullpasture river in Augusta county. He drew a prize of ten thousand dollars in a lottery and this tremendous windfall made him one of the wealthiest local men of the time. This may have made it possible for him to obtain property at the site of present day Huntersville while continuing to retain the property on the Bullpasture river. He also bought Peter Lightner's grist mill on Knapp's creek, and sometime before his death, he donated and deeded the site for the public buildings in Pocahontas county. Despite John Peyton Howe's description of his lowly dwelling house, Bradshaw was described as having the manners of an "elegant gentleman of the old school". In appearance his personality was "striking, large, and portly and scrupulously neat in his dress". He used a crutch that was profusely ornamented with silver mountings.

John Bradshaw and his wife Nancy McKamie Bradshaw had four sons and four daughters; James, John, Thomas, William, Nancy, Elizabeth, Margaret, and Jane. James Bradshaw settled on the old homestead in Augusta county and was succeeded there by his sons John and Franklin; Mrs Eveline Byrd, near Falling Spring, Greenbrier county was a daughter. Two grandsons of James Bradshaw were James Bradshaw of McDowell, and Capt R.H. Bradshaw who was killed at the Battle of Port Republic during the Civil War.

WHO WAS JOHN BRADSHAW ?

Some say John Bradshaw came to America about 1760 along with his brother, James. It was said that James went to Kentucky while John settled in Augusta county, on the Bullpasture River, ten miles below McDowell[1]. Others say John Bradshaw was the son of William Bradshaw of Henrico, Goochland, and Cumberland counties in Virginia[2]. It is a disagreement difficult to settle.

The majority of the early Shenandoah Valley settlers were not "Tidewater" Virginians. Instead, they were Scotch and English from the Ulster plantation of Ireland, Huguenots from France, Lutherans from Germany, and Quakers from Pennsylvania. Most Virginians had considered the Blue Ridge Mountains a western boundary and the early settlers entered the valley from the north, following the river south from its junction with the Potomac. The first two great waves of immigration from Ulster to the colonies of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania began to crowd the frontier southwest of Philadelphia by 1730. In 1738 the Royal Governor of Virginia, supported by Tidewater planters, actively sought to persuade newcomers to leave the crowded frontier and settle in the Shenandoah. Governor Gooch accepted a demand, drawn by the Philadelphia Presbyterian Synod, for religious tolerance as a prerequisite for settlement. The 3rd, 4th, and 5th great immigration waves spilled out of Pennsylvania and peopled the Shenandoah, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Kentucky.

In 1738 an act was passed for the formation of Augusta and Frederick counties but they were not organized until 1745. New magistrates for Augusta county included John Lewis, Thomas Lewis, and George Robinson. "Captain" George Robinson was leader of one of the 12 companies of militia raised in Augusta in 1742, and among his company was a man named William Bradshaw (spelt "Bradshay"). In 1749 William Bradshaw obtained 200 acres on Back Creek, on Reed's Road above Davidson's Survey. Five years later he settled land on a branch of Craig's Creek, northwest of today's Roanoke. Presumably this has some connection with a tributary called "Bradshaw's Creek" that flows down the valley between Pearis Mountain and Fort Lewis. Whether William Bradshaw came across the Blue Ridge Mountains from Goochland county, or down the valley of the Shenandoah from Delaware or Pennsylvania, is not now known[3].

Braddock's defeat at Pittsburgh in 1755 threw the western frontier open to Indian attacks and no degree of safety was restored for 20 years. During that period western pioneers became a law unto themselves, largely ignored by the easterners of the Tidewater.

It was reported, in February 1757, that William Bradshaw and his son were taken prisoner by Indians at Craig's Creek. Later in the same year Bradshaw's neighbor, John Mathews, died and in his will he instructed his sons, George and Sampson Mathews, to convey to Bradshaw a tract of land that he had sold. Presumably the conveyance could not take place because Bradshaw was a captive. Ten years later (1767);

"Sampson and George Mathews, executors of John Mathews, to William McBride. John in his lifetime sold to William Bradshaw 306 acres in the forks of the James River and by his will directed his executors to make deed for the same, and Bradshaw relinquishes his purchase in favor of William McBride."

William Bradshaw's name does not appear in the records after this date but the name of William McBride appears as one of the early Kentucky settlers; he was killed by Indians at the Battle of Blue Licks, 1782(1).

A person named Thomas Bradshaw, described as a "weaver", witnessed a deed in the northern end of the Valley in 1755. Thomas was dead eleven years later and in his will the names of his children are given; James, Jane, and Thomas Jr. Testators to his will were Richard Mathews, William Mathews, and Mary Mathews.

Hugh Hicklin and Elizabeth (his wife ?) conveyed 100 acres of land on a "draft" of Newfoundland Creek, called the Bullpasture, to James Bradshaw in 1766; Wallace Estill was one of the witnesses.

James Bradshaw and Agnes Bradshaw (presumably husband and wife) witnessed the will of Thomas Hicklin, Sr., 20 November 1771, and "James Bradshaw of Fayette county, Kentucky" along with Thomas Bradshaw and Margaret of Augusta county Virginia conveyed property after 1780.

So far there is no established connection found to tie John Bradshaw of Huntersville with any of these earlier Bradshaw's, although he did have connections to the Matthews', the Estill's, and the Hicklin's.

A person named John Bradshaw was settled in Tazewell county, at the head of the Clinch River, about 1771/72. If this was John Bradshaw of Huntersville he would have been but thirteen years old.

NOTES;

Page 9;

(1). Wm. T. Price - Historical Sketches of Pocohantas Co.

(2). Walter Lee Bradshaw - The Bradshaws of Henrico and Goochland Counties, etc.

(3). F. B. Kegley - Virginia Frontier

Page 10;

(1). George M. Chinn - The History of Harrodsburg and the Great Settlement Area of Kentucky.

John Howe Peyton's letter quoted from "Memoir of John Howe Peyton", by Ann M. Peyton.

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10 January 1993

Mr. Bill McNeil
810 2nd Avenue
Marlinton, West Virginia 24954

Dear Mr. McNeil;

Some months ago we spoke on the telephone, regarding the grave of JOHN BRADSHAW in Huntersville, West Virginia. You were very kind to spend time in answering my questions, and I thank you for that !

I've been able to put together a small monograph on John Bradshaw and I enclose a copy for you. Use it as you wish, and if it will help in any way to resolve the encroachment that you described - good.

John Bradshaw's daughter married someone named Byrd in Greenbrier and was later called "Mrs Eveline Byrd". Could it be possible that she is an ancestor of the well-known Byrd family of Virginia ? I'll do more inquiry on that.

I hope your Christmas holiday went well and that your New Year will be happy and prosperous.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Bradshaw

Richard L. Bradshaw
Member Society of Genealogists, London

encl.